



## DEPARTMENT OF STATE:

### TRANSIT SUBSIDY PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ's)

#### 1. What is the Transportation Subsidy Program?

The objective of the Transit Subsidy Federal employee assistance program is to reduce pollution and traffic congestion and to encourage federal employees to use public transportation on a regular and ongoing basis. The Transportation Subsidy Program originated with the Federal Employees Clean Air Incentives Act of 1993, (P.L. 103-72), and was later expanded to include a pre-tax provision, after the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (P.L. 105-178) was passed. In April, 2000, Executive Order 13150 mandated that all Federal agencies in the National Capital Region (NCR) implement a Transportation Subsidy Program by October 1, 2000. The Department of State (DOS) has adopted the policy and made the Program available to all eligible DOS employees nationwide. It provides a non-taxable transit subsidy to eligible employees. This transit subsidy may or may not cover your entire monthly commuting costs.

#### 2. Who is eligible for this program?

Direct-hire (including part-time) employees who are working in domestic assignments at least 24 consecutive weeks in length and use a registered transit system or vanpool on a regular and ongoing basis (i.e. no less than 60 percent of the workweek; at least 3 days per week for full-time employees) to commute from the employee's residence to his or her place of work. Eligible employees include:

- When Actually Employed (WAE) Re-employed annuitants
- Pre-assignment Center employees (PACs) who are not receiving per diem
- Paid interns and paid fellows
- Unpaid interns, unpaid fellows, and unpaid volunteers

\*Note: Paid interns/fellows and unpaid interns/fellows/volunteers are eligible for the program regardless of the length of their assignment.

#### 3. Can I participate in the Transit Subsidy Program if I currently use a Department parking permit?

An employee must terminate participation in the Transit Subsidy Program if the employee has applied for or is currently in possession of a Department subsidized parking permit. Simultaneous enrollment in both programs is prohibited.

#### 4. How do I apply for the program if I am a paid or unpaid employee?

Paid and unpaid employees are able to apply using the DOS TranServe application. TranServe is an internet website, available by going to [www.transerve.dot.gov](http://www.transerve.dot.gov). To access the application, employees should select "Participants" from the top menu, and then select "Transit Benefit Enrollment/Change Application" from the "State" drop-down menu.

First time applicants/users will need to register in the TranServe system and create an account using their State email address. Shortly after submitting your registration information an email will be sent to your state email account with a temporary password. The initial registration is the only time an employee needs to have access to their state email account to manage their transit subsidy application.

Once logged in, you will follow the prompts to submit your Transit Benefit Application. Detailed guidance on the application is available in our Applicant Guide (found on the [DOS Transit Subsidy Program Website](#) or under the State drop-down on the DOT TranServe site).

Please be sure to have the following information when registering and/or submitting a new application.

- Employee ID
- Transportation provider's name
- Monthly cost of your pass or one way cost of your daily commute
- Number of days **per month** you commute via public transportation (max 20).
- Bureau you work for (ex. S, M, HR)
- Work and home address
- Registered SmarTrip card number (if applicable)

#### **5. How do I apply for the program if I am an unpaid intern?**

Unpaid interns are able to apply using the DOS TranServe system. TranServe is an internet website, available by going to [www.transerve.dot.gov](http://www.transerve.dot.gov). To access the application, interns should select "Participants" from the top menu, and then selecting "Transit Benefit Enrollment/Change Application" from the "State" drop-down menu.

First time applicants/users will need to create an account using their State email address. Shortly after submitting your registration information, an email will be sent to your state email account with a temporary password. The initial registration is the only time an intern needs to have access to their state email account in order to manage their transit subsidy application.

Once logged in you will follow the prompts to submit your Transit Benefit Application. Detailed guidance on the application is available in our Applicant Guide (found on the [DOS Transit Subsidy Program Website](#) or under the State drop-down on the DOT TranServe site).

Please be sure to have the following information when registering and/or submitting a new application.

- Last four digits of your SSN
- Transportation provider's name
- Monthly cost of your pass or one way cost of your daily commute
- Number of days **per month** you commute via public transportation (max 20).
- Bureau you work for (ex. S, M, HR)
- Work and home address
- Registered SmarTrip card number (if applicable)
- Internship start and end dates

**All unpaid interns MUST include their internship end date in the comments box of the application. Applications that do not include this information will be denied and returned to the applicant for correction.**

#### **6. Are Transit Subsidy program participants allowed to share benefits or SmarTrip cards?**

This program is intended for your use only. It is non-transferable. It is against the law and the rules of the program to sell or give your Smart Benefits/Transit Subsidy to someone else. Fraudulent activity may result in criminal and/or administrative action. For more information about this topic, please refer to the GAO April 2007 report at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07724t.pdf>.

## **7. What are qualifying transportation expenses?**

Qualifying transportation expenses are defined in the Internal Revenue Code (26 U.S.C. Section 132-9), and include:

- Use of mass transit facilities (subway, rail, bus) or other similar public transportation mode.
- Use of a Commuter Highway Vehicle (having a seating capacity of at least 6 adults not including the driver), and which is used for transporting employees to and from work for at least 80% of the mileage. Vanpools would typically satisfy the criteria for vehicles of this type, while carpools would not.

The Transit Subsidy is only for the actual cost of your daily commute to and from work. The cost of parking at Metro stations and other commuter lots and gas is not covered in your Transit Subsidy. You should not include parking or gas when calculating your eligible Transit Subsidy amount. Transit Subsidy requests that include parking costs or gas will not be approved.

## **8. How do I make changes to the application?**

Program participants are required to submit new applications in TranServe to make changes to subsidy allotments, method of transportation or method of payment. Once you have logged in to your TranServe account using your DOS email address and your password, click the Transit Benefit Application link, and then select “Certify/Enroll” from the options to begin a new application. Your application will pre-fill with the information reflected on your most recent transit subsidy application. You should review all of the listed information and update the applicable fields in your application to request your transit subsidy change(s). You will receive email notifications to confirm your submission and instructions on what to expect next. Once your application is approved, it will replace any previous applications and you will receive approval notification via email.

**New applications are not required if you are only changing your SmarTrip card number and/or address.** If you are updating this information, after clicking the Transit Benefit Application link on the home page, select “Address/SmarTrip Change” from the options and complete the requested information.

## **9. Do I need to take any action if I change regions or bureaus?**

When you transfer from office to office or region to region, you are responsible for submitting a new TranServe application within 5 business days of the processing of your reassignment personnel action. This requirement exists even if your commuting costs do not change. Do not update your application information until the personnel action documenting the change has been processed so that the DOS approver can confirm your information is correct. If the transfer involves a move from one city to another, you must complete a new application in TranServe with your new commuting information and updated home/work addresses.

## **10. Is the value of the Transit Subsidy Program transit passes I receive taxable?**

No, transit subsidy is a non-taxable employee benefit.

## **11. Can I claim transit subsidy while on extended leave/Leave without Pay (LWOP)?**

No, Employees on extended leave (90 days or more) must withdraw from the program by submitting a withdraw application. The employee will then need to complete a new application upon their return to duty to re-enroll in the program.

## **12. If my method of transportation is paid for with a TranServe debit card, how do I receive my card?**

Once the Department of Transportation has processed and approved your application, a TranServe debit card will be ordered from JP Morgan Chase. Your card will be mailed by JP Morgan Chase to your area POC. Once received by the POC, they will contact you for pick up. Participants in the NCR will receive a notification from the HRCC Case System. You will receive instructions for activation and use at the distribution. Please feel free to contact the Human Resources Service Center at [HRSC@state.gov](mailto:HRSC@state.gov) if you have any questions or concerns.

**13. Do I have to register my SmarTrip card? How do I do this?**

To register your SmarTrip card, go to [www.wmata.com](http://www.wmata.com). From Metro's home page, click on "SmartBenefits", scroll down and on the right hand side of the page, you will find "Register a SmarTrip card". Register the card in the same name you will use on your transit application (no nicknames). For SmarTrip cards that have been mailed to you by WMATA, please check online that your card is properly registered to you to avoid delay. For registration assistance, please call WMATA customer support at 888-762-7874.

*\*Please note that changing the name on your Smartrip.com account will not update your Smartrip card registration. These are two separate features that do not link.*

**14. When participating in the SmartBenefits® Program, how often is my Transit Subsidy loaded? What about the TranServe Program?**

Subsidy is automatically loaded to your registered SmarTrip card on the first of each month. Participants who have recently changed their SmarTrip card information or subsidy allocation may experience delays in funding. TranServe debit cards are loaded on the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month. Subsidy provided on the 10<sup>th</sup> is intended to purchase passes for the following month.

**15. Can I receive a reimbursement if I am unable to claim subsidy?**

Transit subsidy is not an immediate, retroactive, or reimbursable benefit. Out-of-pocket expenses are not reimbursed. Participants should plan accordingly to pay for subsidy during processing periods. Any remaining subsidy balance from the preceding month will be removed from the card before new benefits are added the following month.

Please be sure to read and review all program information that is available on the Transit Subsidy Program website. This information includes rider responsibilities, program processes, FAQs, and other important information:

[http://intranet.hr.state.sbu/Benefits\\_Compensation/Benefits/Pages/TransitSubsidyProgramOverview.aspx](http://intranet.hr.state.sbu/Benefits_Compensation/Benefits/Pages/TransitSubsidyProgramOverview.aspx)

**16. Can I add personal funds to my SmarTrip card?**

Yes, your SmarTrip card has 2 purses: transit and personal purses. If you add your own money to the SmarTrip card, either at a kiosk or online, it will go directly to the personal purse. The personal purse holds a maximum of \$300 and is used when the transit purse is empty and when paying for parking. Neither DOS nor DOT have access to your personal purse and consequently will never touch those funds.

**17. Can I be automatically withdrawn from the Transit Subsidy Program?**

Yes. If you do not claim your benefits for three (3) consecutive months, Department of Transportation has been authorized to remove you from the enrollment. You must reapply to

receive transit benefits.

**18. How do I withdraw from the program?**

Participants are required to submit withdrawal applications in TranServe to withdraw from the Transit Subsidy Program. Once you have logged on to the TranServe Application site, select “Transit Benefit Application”. Then, select “Withdraw from the Program” from the menu of options. Complete the requested information, including an effective date for withdrawal. The HR Service Center and the Department of Transportation request that you complete withdraw requests no earlier than 2 weeks before your requested effective date. You will receive an email notification for confirmation.

**19. Who should I contact if I have problems with my subsidy or questions about the Transit Subsidy Program?**

Please contact the HR Service Center at [HRSC@state.gov](mailto:HRSC@state.gov) or 866-300-7419 with any questions about the Transit Subsidy Program or if you are experiencing problems with your subsidy.